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Address

to Examination Master
D.A.R.

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When the Americans arrived in New York, August 29 1776, after their disastrous campaign on Long Island, they immediately fortified the city. General Washington expressed it, as his belief, that the British intended enclosing them on the island of New York by taking post in their rear, while their shipping secured the front, and thus oblige him to fight on terms, or surrender at discretion.

Sept 5th, General Greene urged a general and speedy retreat from New York, and that a council be convened to take action upon that question.

Sept 8th, Washington reported the militia of Connecticut, then with him, as "reduced from six to two thousand men, and, in a few days, the number would be but nominal---twenty or thirty to some regiments----- so that "they were discharged with a recommendation to Governor Trumbull, of Connecticut; that it was about time to begin dealing with deserters." On the same day he reported to Congress that a council, which had convened on the sixth, was opposed to retiring from New York, although acknowledging it would not be tenable if attacked with artillery."

Washington realized it would be useless labor and expense to line the rivers of New York with field works that would require a garrison of thousands, so long as the rivers were under control of a large naval force and veteran army of the eneny that had extended its right wing as far as Flushing and Hell Gate, with posts at Bushwick, Newtown and Astoria. Montressor and Buchanan Islands, now Ward's and Randall's, had been abandoned by the Americans and occupied by the British. Several frigates had passed between Governor's Island and the peninsula, known as Red Hook,

and smaller vessels took position at the head of Wallabout Bay and Newtown Creek where they found depth of water and immunity from the fire of the American guns.

During the two weeks, which succeeded the retreat from Brooklyn, the American army was rapidly falling away, while few recruits were gathering to supply the vacant files.

On Sept I0th Washington began the removal of valuable stores preparatory to ultimate retreat from New York. On the I2th a council was held which decided to retreat, but there was scarcely time permitted them to do so in military order, for on the I3th several frigates of the enemy entered the East River and commanded the works near the foot of Thirteenth street.

On the I4th, from his headquarters at the house of Robert Murray, (for whom Murray Hill is named) Washington observed, toward evening, that six more vessels, two of them men-of-war, passed up the East river and to the station occupied by others on the previous day.

By express Washington received two despatches informing him of formidable movements made by the enemy. One from Colonel Sargeant, at Horn's Hook, ("Hell Gate,") giving an account, "that the enemy, to the ampunt of three or four thousand, had marched to the river and were embarking for Montressa'a Island where numbers of them were then encamped." The other, from General Mifflin, "that uncommon and formidable movements were discovered among the enemy." These despatches having been confirmed by his scouts, Washington proceeded to Harlem where it was supposed, or at Morrisania opposite to it, the principal attempt to land would be made. His head-quarters were then transferred to the house of Roger Morris (Jumel Mansion) very nearly at the centre of the theatre of operations.

The night passed without an attempt at landing. But early the next morning three ships of war passed up the Hudson and took a position near Bloomingdale, thus "putting a stop to the Americans of the removal, by water, of any more provisions" and other stores.

General Putnam was detailed with a command of four thousand men, to cover the retreat while the remaining divisions moved to Kingsbridge and Blue Bell Fort, later Fort Washington.

On the following Sunday, Sept I5th, the British embarked upon their flat-bottom boats, and were carried, by favoring tides direct to Kipp's Bay where they landed. The patriots, at sight of the invading hosts, fled panic-striken, utterly demoralized. General Putnam's command was in imminent peril of capture, but escaped by a miracle, and he and Washington encountered each other at what is now the west side of Broadway between 43rd and 44th streets where a tablet is ~~or has been~~ placed to mark the spot.

General Howe established his head-quarters at the Beekman mansion, 52nd street and First Avenue, and before four o'clock on that memorable Sunday the American flag disappeared for seven long years from Fort George. New York was now in possession of the British.

Captain Alexander Hamilton led the refugees through a wilderness to Harlem while little Major Aaron Burr, riding from front to rear and back again, encouraged the fainting and terrorized men, women and children. There was no sleep for the patriots that night on Harlem Heights; instead, there were hours of labor in beating rain, without tents, limited rations, no cooking utensils, while the British were behaving in unseemly manner; the Americans cooped up on the hills, while the regulars stretched their lines

across the fields from river to river encompassing them completely, laughing at and reviling them for timid sheep and sounding the contemptuous notes of the Fox-chase, and singing Yankee Doodle at the top of their lungs.

During the following four weeks of their encampment on Harlem Heights many events transpired. The first was the unfortunate deaths of Major Leicht and Colonel Thomas Knowlton of Connecticut, who had organized a small band of Rangers who unfortunately began their attack upon the enemy too soon at the battle of Harlem Heights, Sept I6th. Major Leicht received three shots in his side, and in a short time Colonel Knowlton received a mortal wound. The Colonel was sadly missed and greatly mourned. His gallantry at Breed's Hill identified him with the first battle of the war, and he was most valorous in service. He fell like a hero, saying, "I do not value my life. If we but get the day!" Major Leicht breathed his last two weeks later.

Great was the consternation among the Americans on the night of Sept 2Ist, when gazing cityward they beheld what appeared to be thw whole heavens aflame. 'Twas not until the following day when Captain Montressor, of Sir William Howe's staff, visited the American lines under flag of truce, that they learned that New York had been visited by a holocost, which commenced in a small wooden house on the wharf near Whitehall Slip which was occupied by a number of men and women of bad character. The fire began late at night, and the Americans having carried off all the bells of the city, the alarm could not be speedily communicated. Very few citizens were in town. The fire raged with inconceivable violence, destroying all the houses on the east side of Whitehall Slip, the west side of Braadway to Beaver Lane, and did not stop until it

reached Mortlike street (now Barclay). Fire extinguishers, ~~were~~ of any kind, were not to be had, and so intense was the heat that the use of the bucket brigade was impossible.

The British attributed the devastation to a New England man holding a Captain's commission in the Continental army. He was seen with a large bundle of matches, dipped in melted resin, in his possession. He was seized and hanged on the spot. General Robertson, then British commandant of New York, rescued two more supposed incendiaries from the engaged populace who were about to consign them to the flames. One man, by the name of White, was observed to cut the leather buckets which contained the water for which misdemeanor he, too, was promptly hanged. Many other similar events enlivened the scene of devastation. It was not until Colonel Montressor mentioned, in the presence of Adjutant-General Reed, General Putnam, Captain Alezander Hamilton, Captain William Hull, and others, the capture and execution of a spy, named Nathan Hale, a Captain of Colonel Knowlton's Rangers, that Hale's fate became known. Hale had been a classmate and intimate friend of Hull who was dreadfully shocked and grieved over the sad, and disastrous ending of his friend who had been sent by Washington to visit Long Island and obtain accurate knowledge of the movements of the British army. He received these instructions from his Commander-in-Chief at the Murray House where Washington then had his head-quarters. Hale's mission would have been successful had he not been betrayed by his own cousin, Samuel Hale, who was a Tory ~~and who had some time previously~~ and told the British that Nathan was a spy in the ~~Continental army~~ American forces. Nathan even so, might have been acquitted, but Samuel swore against him, making oath that he was a Captain in the Continental army, in consequence of which, he was hanged upon an

apple tree in the neighborhood of what is now Third Ave. and Sixty-third street.

Captain Montressor related, in detail, the last few moments of Captain Hale. He said his tent was near Sir William Howe's head-quarters at Beekman Mansion, near Turtle Bay. It was nearly eleven o'clock in the morning when the sound of the drum-and-fife, beating the rogues march, reached his ears. Attracted by the music, he went to the door. Coming from the direction of the greenhouses, which were near the Beekman Mansion, was a small procession, headed by a rough, brutal looking man on horseback, his face florid with deep potations, his eyes roving about constantly, carefully examining every tree with practiced eye. Behind him came the drummer and fifer and several men with picks and spades; behind them marched a group of soldiers guarding a prisoner. Last of all---a cart. The brutal looking man was Provost Marshall, Cunningham, who presented strong contrast to his prisoner---a tall, young fellow of about twenty-one, with face so handsome, so ingenious, that it attracted my attention, and I inquired of Cunningham who the prisoner was. He told me ---"A rebel spy, caught in the act, and which he fully confessed. No court-martial necessary in such a case." Then pointing out a tree, not thirty feet away from my tent, he said to his associates, "This tree will do. Dig the grave there!" A group of men, from the artillery corps, had been attracted by the music and gathered about the fatal tree, indulging in rough jokes. The ground was hard, and I saw it would take some time to prepare for the execution, so I asked Cunningham to permit the prisoner to come into my tent till all was ready. He consented, adding with a laugh, "Don't let him escape; it wouldn't do to rob the tree of its fruit."

Thoroughly

disgusted with his brutality, I approached the young fellow and invited him to come to my tent and sit down. I then asked him, if there were not something I could do to assist him, and offered him paper, ink and quills, believing he would like to write a letter. He accepted these gratefully and wrote rapidly. He then asked me to send the letters into the American lines, under flag of truce. With dimmed eyes I promised him I would, and I then informed him I was Captain Montressor of Sir William Howe's staff, chief engineer of the army. I also told him, that an intercession on my part with Howe, backed by some statements of his own and from his military authorities might at least delay the execution of his Excellency's sentence. He thanked me for ~~my~~ your kindness and said, "I was taken with maps and plans of the very fortifications which ~~I~~ you, perhaps, had designed. I have admitted my rank, and the reason for being within your lines. I am Captain ~~[redacted]~~ Nathan Hale, of Knowlton's Rangers of the Continental army." I was greatly surprised that a man of his rank and character should have run the risk of meeting so ignominious a death; to which he answered, "Any act, sir, which is necessary for the furtherance of the cause of one's country becomes honorable. No, sir. My only regret is that I have but onee life to give for my country!" He spoke with such profound conviction that I was speechless. Suddenly the door was darkened by the burly form of Cunningham. Hale stood up. "Are you ready for me, Provost Marshall?" he enquired politely. "Here are two letters which I would like your permission for Captain Montressor to deliver. They are to my father---and to another." Cunningham picked up the letters, read them through with increasing rage, then deliberately tore them up. Poor Hale winced; and I was furious

when Cunningham turned, with a leer, to me, expecting my approval. I expressed my sentiments with contempt which caused him to stammer, half apologetically, "I did not wish the damned rebels to know they had a man who could die with so much firmness." Then to Hale he said, "Well, mister spy, are you ready? We are." Hale shook hands in farewell with me, thanking me for my kindness to a stranger --- and an enemy at such a moment. "I am ready," said Hale. Cunningham then motioned him out of my tent and he was again surrounded by guards. He mounted the cart without assistance. His arms were pinioned behind his back, his feet tied. His calmness and dignity impressed those who had been ribald but a moment before. Cunning- ~~Montressor was completely unnerved by his recital. Hale's strong~~ ham gave the signal and poor Hale was swung into eternity." Montressor was completely unnerved by his recital. Hale's strong personality and fate impressed him deeply. It had occurred only that morning - Sunday, Sept. 22nd.

The location of the American army at Harlem Heights was admirable to resist any advance from New York itself. Three lines of intrenchments extended across the narrow neck of land, hardly half a mile wide, between the Hudson and Harlem rivers. These intrenchments were embraced within less than a mile, from near 145th street northward; just within the upper lines was the house of Colonel Morris occupied by Washington. Fort Washington (or as it was then called---Blue Bell Fort) was still a mile beyond. On the east side of the Harlem river, and as far as Throgg's Neck, detached redouts and earthworks---called alarm posts---were established so that the whole front from the Hudson to Long Island Sound was under guard.

~~October 11th, Washington made a personal inspection of~~

On October 5th the army return of Adjutant-General Reed revealed a total force of 25,735 men of whom 8,075 were sick or on furlough----II,27I wanting to complete the regiments. A foot note, in this return, states, that General Lincoln's Massachusetts militia computed at four thousand men, are so scattered and ignorant of the forms of return, that none can be got. The fourteen brigades nominally comprised forty-four regiments; Major Backus light-horse numbered one hundred and fifty eight, and Colonel Knox's artillery numbered five hundred and eighty rank and file, including sick and those on furlough.

On the 8th of October, the American army in New Jersey exhibited a total of six thousand five hundred and forty-eight officers and men, stationed at the Amboys, Woodbridge, Elizabethtown, Newark and Fort Constitution, afterward Fort Lee.

On October IIth, Washington made a personal investigation of the troops at their alarm posts---a timely action, within twenty-four hours of the advance of the British army.

On October I2th, General Howe began the execution of his plan, to cut off Washington's army from New England and upper New York and fasten it to its own line for future capture. And again he embarked with his men in the flat-bottom boats to penetrate the fastness of Westchester County, leaving Lord Percy at McGown's pass with three brigades to cover New York, while the troops at Flushing were ordered to cross to the city at once.

On October I6th, a council of war was held at the headquarters of General Lee at Fort Constitution. Lee had rejoined Washington on the fourteenth, only two days before the council. After much consideration it was decided to retain Fort Washington as long as possible, although Washington, himself, was not over-

sanguine of its advisability. Lee openly expressed his disapprobation of the measure; and General Clinton declared that it was not possible to prevent British communication being cut off. However, the majority ruled, and it was agreed that Fort Washington be retained as long as possible. Thus, while the British army advanced upon its mission, the American army abandoned New York Island, leaving a small garrison at Fort Washington, still holding fast to Kingsbridge.

As soon as the British movements became well defined, and the main part of his army reached the northern shore of Long Island, Washington transferred his head-quarters to Valentine's Hill, Yonkers, forwarding all necessary supplies to White Plains his object being to crowd the British army toward the coast, and use the interior line---which was at his service---to thwart the plans of Howe, and place himself in a position to fight him on favorable ground.

Fort Washington, or Mount Washington, was 238 feet above the level of the Hudson river, a hastily built earthwork without a ditch of any consequence, and with no exterior defense that could entitle it as a fortress. The only water obtainable was that from the Hudson itself. This work mounted 18 guns, and is described as a pentagonal bastioned earthwork. The territory to be defended had a radius of three miles. The main work was intended in conjunction with Fort Constitution (Fort Lee) on the opposite side of the river and certain obstructions were to be placed in the channel to guard the water communications, but these had failed to interrupt the movements of the hostile British fleet.

The enlistments of the majority of the twelve hundred men within the garrison of Fort Washington were near an end. Howe

had discovered this fact and issued proclamations at once, assuring those who would not enlist again, the guarantee of the blessing of peace, and secure enjoyment of their liberties and properties as well as full pardon. Many of the men were only too ready to accept these terms. Among a few of the subordinate officers "greed" usurped the place of patriotism, for at that time peculiar regulations reigned in the Continental army. Officers were selected on condition that they should throw their pay and rations into a joint stock for the benefit of a company; surgeons sold recommendations for furloughs for able-bodied men at six pence each; and a captain was cashiered for stealing blankets from his soldiers,---and it was to men of this calibre only that Howe's offer appealed.

William Demont, adjutant-general of Colonel Magaw, commander of the garrison at Fort Washington, was one of these ignoble wretches who deserted to the enemy, bearing to Lord Percy full plans and information pertaining to the garrison through which it was later captured. Earl Percy joined General Howe at White Plains October 30th, and to him revealed Demont's treachery with the result that Howe hastened back to New York to take advantage of the information he had received.

On November 2nd, General Knyphausen departed from New Rochelle, crossed the river at Dykman's bridge, took possession of the abandoned works in the vicinity of Kingsbridge and encamped upon the plains between there and Fort Washington. The Americans from Fort Independence on Tettard's Hill, which Colonel Lasher of the Americans, had burned at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 31st of October to prevent the enemy securing the barracks, fled to Fort Washington. At this time the whole country, beyond the Harlem river between Morrisania and Dobb's Ferry was in possession of the British----Fort Washington completely environed by the enemy.

Within the garrison itself, composed chiefly of Pennsylvania troops, optimism prevailed, the men being blissfully unconscious of the treason of one of their number.

There were frequent skirmishes between the Pennsylvania soldiers and the Hessians and British in the vicinity in which the Pennsylvanians won nearly all the victories. One lad of 18 killed a Hessian, helped himself to his beautiful sword, which Colonel Magaw later presented to the youth with much ceremony; another patriot, a sergeant, caused vast amusement by killing a British officer, stripping him of his uniform which he also appropriated for himself, wore it, as proud as a peacock to possess it.

By November 15th every precaution against attack had been completed. On the same day Adjutant-General Patterson of the British was sent to the fort with peremptory summons to surrender or be put to the sword. Colonel Magaw refused absolutely to comply, upon which General Howe opened a cannonade from two British redouts upon the American outworks, a little above Kingsbridge, and a terrific battle ensued which, undoubtedly, would have terminated very differently had it not been for the traitor--- Demont. Neither Colonel Magaw nor General Greene then at Fort Constitution were aware of the fact that on the night of November 14th, thirty flat-bottom boats, under command of Wilkinson and Molly had passed up the river unobserved by either fort and entered Spuyten Duyvil creek and reached Kingsbridge. The "Pearl" was stationed in the North River to cover the landing of the Hessians and flank the American line. Magaw exerted his every effort in behalf of the beseiged garrison. Despite his efforts he was eventually compelled to surrender. Knyphausen planted the Hessian flag on Fort Tryon while the British invested Fort Washington already

crowded to its capacity. The patriots, who had been driven into the garrison from the exterior lines, combined with the 1200 already there, amounted to 3000 men. A scene of utter demoralization ensued as the enemy invaded the fort, threatening the Americans with the butts of their guns, reminding them that as soon as they reached New York they would all be hanged and quartered, and were cursed as damned traitors and rebels. No pen can ever inscribe fitting description of the terrible scene. Margaret Corbin, wife of a gunner who fell, sprang to the piece and manned it until the end of hostilities under the strong fire of the enemy.

In Washington's despatch to Congress, he stated, "That Colonel Magaw had posted his lines all to the southward," and it was the knowledge of "these lines all to the southward" which enabled the British to win their dearly bought victory. The King's troops entered upon the side they knew would be unprotected. The loss to the Americans did not exceed 134. The British loss was about the same, but the Hessians lost 326 men.

Washington, standing upon Fort Lee with his general officers and Thomas Paine, witnessed with sadness some of the slaughter near the fort, and, with streaming eyes, beheld the meteor flag of Great Britain gleaming over the ramparts in the November sunshine and knew Fort Washington had ~~become Fort Knyphausen.~~ Fort Lee was at once evacuated, although one quartermaster, three surgeons and ninety men became prisoners of war.

After the arrival of the (2634) prisoners taken at Fort Washington in New York they were searched, robbed of all their few valuables---even silver knee and shoe buckles, stripped of their clothes and informed such garments were too good for rebels, who, later, were unable to change their linen or shirts for three or

four months at a time. Hundreds of the officers and men were confined in the Provost Prison, taken from thence and thrown into the hold of the prison ships already so overcrowded that even the cold December weather they could scarcely keep any clothes upon them, being kept in constant sweat. The food was unworthy of a name. The commissary pretended to allow half a pound of bread and four ounces of pork a day as a ration, but of this pittance they were even cut short, and so pinched for food were some of the poor fellows that they would pick up and eat the salt that chanced to be scattered . They would gather up the bran the Light Horse wasted and eat it though mixed with dirt and filth. Most of the bread was made out of the bran brought over to feed the horses. The pork was so saturated with bilge water in its transportation that it was unfit for any human stomach. Frequently well-fed representatives of Great Britain would visit them, adjure them to renounce the cause they had espoused, and with smug satisfaction taunt the prisoners by saying, "This is just punishment for your rebellion. Nay, you are treated too well for rebels, you have not received half of what you deserve. But if you will enlist into His Majesty's service you shall have victuals and clothes enough." Notwithstanding this alluring proposal they, one and all, rejected the meretricous overtures. Then they were cursed as stubborn rebels. "Every one, every damned one of you, ought to be hanged," even offered the unfortunates their choice of a halter, ordered a gallows be erected before their very eyes as if they were to be immediately executed. But even this did not intimidate the patriots. Then, when these British officers saw that their threats of summary execution could not seduce honor, they threatened to send them all to the West Indies and sell them there as slaves.

After the poor fellows were thoroughly steam cooked, their lungs filled with the foul air, many were transferred to the North Dutch church on the lower part of York Island where they were confined, without covering or a spark of fire to warm their chilled bodies and where their suffering from the cold equalled the excrutiating tortures of heat heretofore endured. Many of the unfortunates succumbed to consumption which swept them off at a startling rate. Every twenty-four hours furnished its quota of prisoners until every church and prison in the city was filled to overflowing.

On January I9 I777, General Howe discharged many of the privates who were prisoners in New York.One half he had already sent to the world of spirits for want of food, the other he sent to warn their countrymen of the danger of falling into his hands or rather those of his mercenary commissioners or Provost Marshalls like William Cunningham.

Another article for which these prisoners suffered terribly was water, which, though so brackish and nasty, yet even this vile stuff they were denied. Sick and well huddled together was responsible for the frightful death rate among them, for it made no difference to the Marshall whether the desease was infectious or not.

The only consolation permitted us to-day is the recollection that this monster of depravity met his just deserts after the close of the war. He had returned to Europe where he boasted openly of his evil exploits in America and of the many rebels he had sent to hell. He settled in Wales where he led a dissipated evil life, and to obtain money committed forgery for which he received the punishment he had meted out to the hundreds of innocent

prisoners entrusted to his tender mercies, for he was hanged as a forger---more than merited in this instance.

It was seven long years before the Americans again secured possession of New York, and the British were forced to evacuate the stronghold they had held so securely during that period.

P.S. ------ There were many Stockbridge Indians with Washington's forces at the battles of White Plains and Fort Washington.

Mrs F. L. Steggman.

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